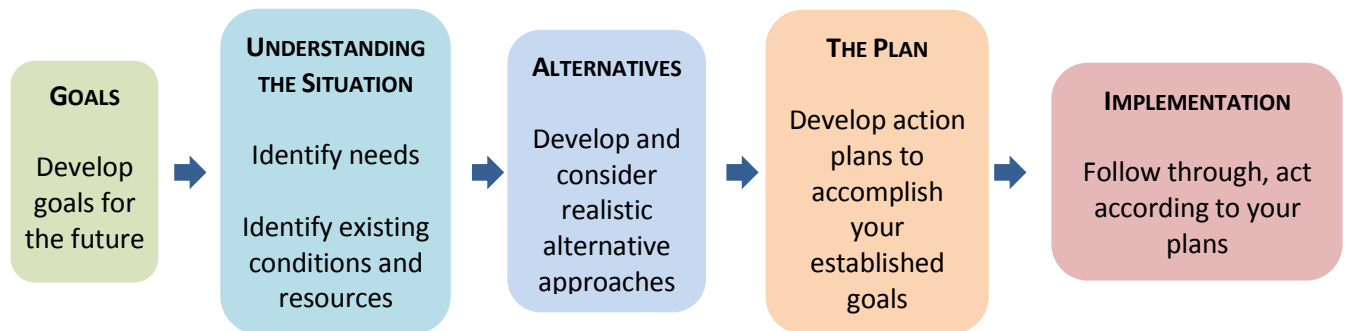


# THE PLANNING PROCESS

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## Introduction

Local government officials constantly address a wide range of issues and to do so effectively they need information and options. Planning is a process designed to provide information to decision makers. The planning process can be described as consisting of the following steps:

- Identifying issues and setting goals
- Assessing current conditions in light of issues and goals
- Identifying, evaluating, and selecting alternative ways of accomplishing goals
- Developing action plans for accomplishing the goals
- Implementing the action plans

Although the planning process can be used for a variety of purposes, many communities in Alaska have employed these steps to develop official plans and policies.



# The Planning Process

## Step 1: Identify Issues and Set Goals

The first step in the community planning process entails identifying issues and preparing goal statements that respond to these issues. Community goal statements reflect the needs and concerns of the residents, as well as businesses, public agencies, and other organizations that operate in the community or that have an interest in how the community develops.

Surveys using written questionnaires and public meetings that solicit the knowledge of local residents concerning community problems and opportunities are two methods frequently used in developing community goals.

It is important that the community be realistic in setting its goals. The community should be able to accomplish its goals with the resources available to it.

## Step 2: Assess Current Conditions

The second step in the community planning process is an inventory and analysis of current conditions. The intent is to identify and describe existing conditions and available community resources that relate to the issues under consideration. Without an appreciation of the conditions that exist in the community, local officials may overlook desirable solutions to identified issues and may waste valuable resources.

## Step 3: Identify, Evaluate, and Select Realistic Alternative Approaches to Meeting the Goals

The community goal statements and inventory information form the basis for identifying and evaluating alternative approaches to accomplishing the community goals. The pros and cons of plausible alternatives are evaluated to select the one or a combination of several alternatives that is most desirable.

## Step 4: Develop Action Plans to Accomplish Goals

By this stage in the planning process, local decision-makers should have an idea of:

- Problems and opportunities based on assessments of the current community conditions and the availability of resources.
- Residents' views on the issues at hand in terms of needs and priorities.
- The most appropriate alternatives for addressing each of the community's goals.

Once acceptable alternatives are selected for each goal, the next step is to develop action plans. In brief, an action plan sets out what is to be done, who is to do it, and a time schedule.

An action plan might not specify who is responsible for implementing the action and a time schedule for its completion. These may be handled administratively rather than in an official plan adopted by the decision making body. However, to be an effective guide, the action recommendation in a plan should at least:

- Accurately reflect the community's goal.
- Be based directly upon the alternative approach selected.
- Be as specific as possible without being overly detailed or restrictive.
- Require management skills and expertise readily available either within the community or from outside sources.
- Be achievable within the scheduled period of time.

Action plans may include policy statements. Policies are action oriented statements that provide direction to the parties responsible for carrying out an action plan.

### **Step 5: Implement the Action Plans**

In addition to carrying out actions, implementation typically entails a process of monitoring progress and reporting the results back to community decision makers. If certain actions fail to produce desired results within the established timetable, or if community conditions change significantly, the plans may be altered and revised.

Most communities probably use these five steps to problem solving at least informally. However, for complex problems, a community may want to employ the planning process in a more formal way. It may want to produce planning documents that address specific issues. These documents may include capital improvements programs, 14(c)(3) reconveyance plans, economic development plans, transportation plans, land use plans, and comprehensive plans. When adopted by the community, these constitute policy documents the community relies upon when making decisions about community development.

# The Statutory Basis of Municipal Planning

Alaska Statutes 29.40.010 through 29.40.200 define and direct how planning and land use regulatory powers are to be exercised by Alaskan municipalities. The sections of Title 29 shown below address the legal responsibilities and planning authorities of municipalities.

## Where Do I Look in Title 29 for More Information Regarding Our Legal Planning Authority and Responsibilities?

Review the following sections of Title 29 if you have questions regarding your local government's legal responsibilities and legal authority in terms of planning.

Section Number of AS 29.40 to Look under	Section Number of AS 29.40 to Look under
10. Planning, platting, and land use regulation	110. Plat procedure
20. Planning commission	120. Alteration or replat petition
30. Comprehensive plan	130. Notice of hearing
40. Land use regulation	140. Hearing and determination
50. Appeals from administrative decisions	150. Recording
60. Judicial review	160. Title to vacated area
70. Platting regulation	170. Delegations
80. Platting authority	180. Prohibited acts; criminal penalties
90. Abbreviated plats and waivers	190. Civil remedies and penalties
100. Information required	200. Subdivisions of state land

The city council or borough assembly has the primary responsibility for implementing planning powers. Title 29 provides for the creation of a local planning commission and platting authority to assist the council or assembly with their planning duties. The council or assembly must pass an ordinance to create these planning bodies.

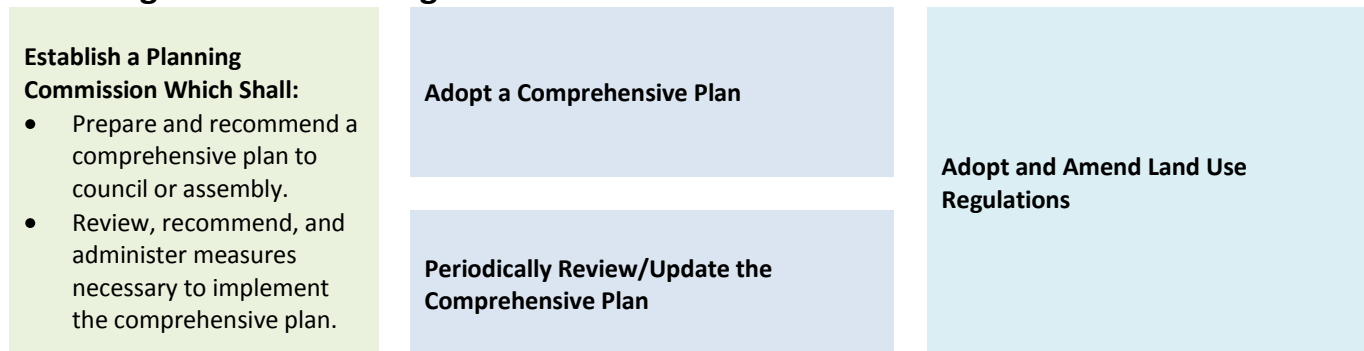
## Which Alaskan Municipalities Have the Authority to Plan and Control Land Use?

Any community can plan but state law expressly provides some types of communities with the authority and, in some cases, the requirement to plan and regulate land use. However, in order to regulate land use, a community must adopt what state law calls a comprehensive plan. The following chart summarizes the planning, land use regulation, and platting powers and authority of different types of communities to exercise them.

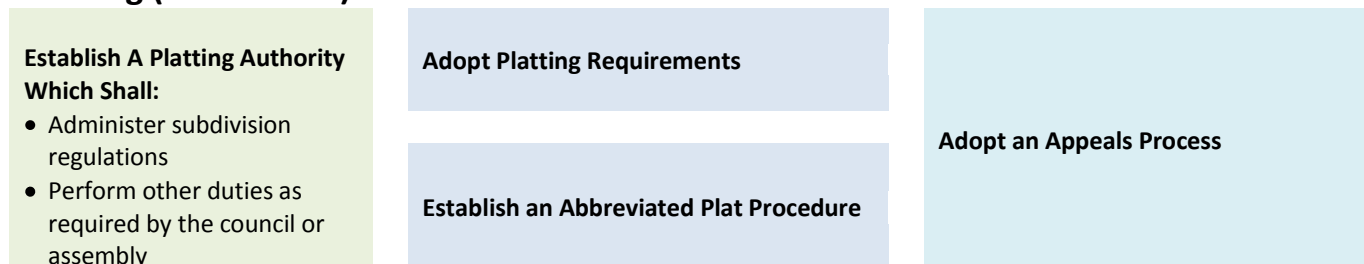
## The Municipal Authority to Plan and Control Land Use

Planning can be performed by any Alaskan community. State law provides certain communities with the authority, procedures, and responsibility to plan and regulate land use. For example, to regulate land use by ordinance, an Alaskan community must adopt a comprehensive plan as well as certain administrative procedures and regulations. The following chart summarizes the planning and land use regulatory powers and the responsibilities that are optional or mandatory for the various classes of Alaskan municipalities.

### Planning and Land Use Regulation Powers



### Platting (Subdivision) Powers



### Authority

If you are a...

...the planning, land use, and platting powers above are...

Home rule, first class, or second class city in a borough

By delegation of the borough

Second class city in the unorganized borough

Optional

First class city in the unorganized borough

Mandatory

Home rule city in the unorganized borough

Mandatory

Home rule, first class or second class borough

Mandatory

On an area-wide basis (both inside and outside of cities), or borough may delegate any or all of these powers to a city within the borough.

### The Comprehensive Plan

State law requires communities that desire to implement zoning regulations, land use permit requirements, and other regulatory measures to control land uses (except platting regulations), to adopt a comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan is an official public document adopted by a local government as a policy guide to decisions about community development.

AS 29.40.030 defines a comprehensive plan as, “... *a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social, and economic development...*” of a city or borough. The plan, as its name implies, comprehensively addresses development for the entire area of the city or borough. AS 29.40.030(b) requires that the comprehensive plan be adopted by ordinance.

### **The Planning Commission**

A city council or borough assembly has the legal authority to engage in planning, platting and land use regulation. However, AS 29.40.020 directs that a council or an assembly that provides planning and land use regulation shall create a planning commission and delegate to it certain planning and land regulation responsibilities. The local ordinance establishing the planning commission describes its duties.

State law requires that the commission prepare and submit to the governing body a comprehensive plan, and that it review, recommend, and administer measures necessary to implement the comprehensive plan. The planning commission may be assisted by a staff to carry out its planning and implementation responsibilities.

### **Planning Staff**

A city typically engages in planning activity whether or not it has a planner on staff. A mayor, administrator, clerk, and other personnel may assume these responsibilities as the need arises for information developed through a planning process. On the other hand, the services of a planner at times may be beneficial. For instance, a city’s regular planning work load may grow to a level beyond the capabilities of its existing staff. Also, an experienced planner may be needed occasionally to carry out a major or complex planning project.

Many small communities, which are not financially able to hire a full time planner or planning staff in response to these needs, have addressed the problem in different ways. They may arrange to bring in a planner from a nearby jurisdiction to work on an as needed basis. Alternatively, several communities may jointly hire a planner to serve each of them on a part-time basis, so that planning services are available to each for only a fraction of the cost of a full-time professional. Some communities contract with planning consultants (individuals or firms) to work on specific projects. In some communities, local people obtain training and, because of their familiarity with local conditions, become valuable planning staff.

There is no one right level of planning activity or right way to obtain planning services. Each community should examine its needs, explore its options, and select ways that are most beneficial to it.